



Kansas Commission on Disability Concerns

Testimony to the Health Policy Authority Open Forum in Pittsburg, KS

November 21, 2006

Members of the Board and Staff:

I am Kerrie Bacon, with the Kansas Commission on Disability Concerns (KCDC). We are charged with providing information to the Governor, the Legislature, and to State agencies about issues of concern to Kansans with disabilities (K.S.A. 74-6706). The focus of the Commission is to work at a state level to improve employment opportunities for people with disabilities. KCDC believes that all people with disabilities are entitled to be equal citizens and equal partners in Kansas society. A key component of this is having a job and paying taxes. Currently the unemployment rate for Kansans with disabilities is 63%.

There are two areas we have been hearing as barriers to employment for people with disabilities that may fall under your influence.

1. The first is Worker's Compensation (WC). Our understanding is that employers who submit claims have their insurance premiums increased. It's understood that the lower premiums are the incentive for providing safer work environments. However one of the consequences of this system is employees injured on the job, who end up with long term disabilities, are seen as a liability to the company's bottom line profit. We receive calls from individuals who believe they are being discriminated against because they have a current or past worker's compensation claim. We don't have the expertise in the Worker's Compensation process to provide you with a detailed solution. We would encourage KHPA to look into ways to lessen the impact of WC insurance premiums on the employment and/or retention of people with disabilities.
2. The second is employee health insurance for small businesses. Small companies that do provide health insurance for their employees believe that hiring people with disabilities will mean an increase in health policy usage which would then increase health insurance costs. We would encourage the Health Policy Authority to provide the opportunity for small businesses to pool into a large health insurance group, thus reducing this barrier to hiring people with disabilities.

Implementing some form of these incentives will have a significant impact on reducing unemployment barriers for people with disabilities and increase the Kansas tax base.



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The Kansas Commission on Disability Concerns is willing to be a resource and help in this process if needed.

Thank you for your attention to this important matter concerning people with disabilities.

Respectfully,

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